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ABSTRACT

Because the future of the majority of developing nations depends on how quickly and effectively a national system of education can be developed, the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) has established a series of international development programs to prepare and implement programs for cooperation between Sweden and developing nations. SIDA programs are designed in accordance with the following beliefs: (1) responsibility for all activities should rest upon the local authority; (2) when providing technical assistance, SIDA staff should show openness and flexibility in relation to the specific nature of the country being served; (3) it is impossible to introduce a ready-made distance education system in a new country; and (4) as experts and consultants, SIDA staff members are responsible for training local staff. One such SIDA-sponsored effort is a program to establish a distance education institute for teacher training for untrained teachers working full-time in primary and secondary schools in Sri Lanka. The local authority decided to include the following components in the system: printed self-instructional material, assignments for submission, contact lessons (seminars), local study centers, and practical training. SIDA is also assisting in the establishment of a distance teacher training program in Ethiopia and has received a request for assistance from Mozambique. (MN)

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SUPPORTING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN ESTABLISHING DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Paper presented at the ICDE 13th World Conference,
Melbourne, Australia, 13-20 August, 1985

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Supporting Developing Countries in Establishing Distance Education Institutions

Educators and educational planners the world over during the last few decades have experienced a growing interest from all directions in new forms of education. Distance education can be taken as one example of how, with new methods of education, one should be able to reach larger groups of people. Distance education has been based on psychology of learning theories and has utilized instructional technology in the development of self-study material. Distance education, however, is not a new thing as it has existed in the form of correspondence education for over a hundred years. But a newly awakened interest in this form of education has become noticeable over the last few decades.

In developing countries education is one of the main problems. The future of the majority of the developing countries depends on how quickly and effectively a national system of education can be developed. This implies a radical change of direction, contents and methods in the existing educational system. The problem is one of funding, quality and quantity. This goes for primary, secondary, vocational, further and higher education, and teachers´ training, as well as work in the field of literacy. A problem which many countries have in common is that they have inherited an educational system from a colonial power. Such a system did not always meet the requirements of the country in question, and its exclusive aim was the passing of a final examination.

Such an examination system is strongly selective and competitive, and there is a tendency towards learning by rote. This leads to a situation in which both teacher and student view education as something static, which in turn means that learning is regarded as the creation of a given immutable mass of knowledge, accepted once and for all. Lifelong learning plays, of necessity, a subordinate roll in an educational system of this type.

One of the paradoxes of society to-day is that the imparting of knowledge can no longer be regarded as the sole duty of a teacher. It is just as important, especially in a developing country, that the student be made aware of the importance of change, and to train his/her ability in the acceptance of change. Factual knowledge in itself has a limited value in a changing world where fresh knowledge is continually emerging, and there must be a constant reappraisal of previously accepted theories and concepts. Practical, utilisable knowledge, in such a situation, is to be found more in the ability to discover and use relevant facts, more in the ability to pose the right questions, than in providing the correct answer.

If the problem is viewed in this way it is natural to look around for a form of education which can help to counteract these negative effects. Distance education can be one such form.

The population explosion in developing countries makes the prob-

lems even more acute. In countries where 30-40 % of the population and even more is under the age of fifteen, the economic and manpower resources are already severely strained. The burden of an expanding school system is very heavy which means that there is an interest in distance education as a way of reducing the problems.

As a result of the population explosion and the demand for education and work, urbanization has increased. This has led to problems of big cities also in developing countries. If good, appropriate education were available in rural areas migration might possibly be reduced and the rural population might prefer to stay where they are. This is of particular importance for women.

The question is, however, what are the appropriate fields and levels towards which developing countries should direct their efforts in order to meet with the problems discussed above.

One essential field is secondary edcuation. Secondary school education in certain countries and especially in rural areas has not been developed to the same extent as primary or higher education. It seems possible to contribute to expand this type of education by means of distance education. It might also be possible to reduce the high drop-out rate in secondary education, which has been reported from several countries.

Another field is teachers' training. In many developing countries primary school teachers are underqualified or unqualified, and this is also frequently the case with secondary school teachers. The problem has two aspects namely the up-grading and in-service training of teachers already working as teachers, and the training of new teachers.

A third field is vocational training. The lack of qualified workers is a great problem in developing countries. One way to provide vocational training is by distance education where the theoretical parts of the training can be distributed by distance teaching while the practical training can be offered locally.

A fourth field is different forms of non-formal training. Examples of essential areas for non-formal training are nutrition, hygiene, basic health service, feeding habits etc. To inform and train people, especially women, seems to be of great importance and can be carried out by means of distance education.

Still another field, a fifth, could be higher education. Much effort and money has been spent in developing countries on higher education, and distance education has been used as a method.

In all the fields mentioned above distance education can be used and has sometimes been used. Distance education is an economically advantageous form of education for meeting the problems, and it also offers considerable pedagogical and social advantages.

In the light of what has been discussed above we know that distance education is used as an educational form in developing countries. We also know from many contacts that many countries want to use the form in their educational systems. We have also experien-

ced that many countries are looking for assistance either in revising their existing distance education or in building up distance education institutions.

From a more practical point of view we have some experience of supporting developing countries in their work with distance education. The projects we have been involved in have all been supported by SIDA (the Swedish International Development Authority). The Swedish international development programmes are operated by SIDA, and its function is to prepare and implement programmes for bilateral development co-operation. The fundamental principle for Swedish development co-operation is to support national efforts for development. The Swedish support aims at strengthening the recipient country's possibilities to carry out its development plans. The responsibility for the implementation of activities thus supported, rests upon the country itself.

In our practical work we have tried to act according to some general principles which are reasonably well in line with those mentioned above. Firstly, we strongly feel that the responsibility for all activities should rest upon the local authority. The programme is a national one and should be run by the local staff in the future. That is why from the very beginning of the building-up process, local staff must be in charge and thus made aware of every step taken. As a consequence, all production work necessary for the programme, such as course writing, editing, lay-out, the printing of textbooks, the production of aids etc, must be done locally and by local staff. This, of course, does not mean that we shy away from all responsibility. What we mean is that it as part of the programme that local staff are trained to take responsibility, whereas we accept the moral responsibility for the programme.

For an educational material and an educational system to function well, it must be deeply rooted in the community with respect to the cultural, traditional, religious, and educational characteristics of the country in question. This brings us to the second principle of ours. When working as consultants and experts, we must show openess and flexibility in relation to the specific nature of the country and its people. This principle, of course, is more or less a corollary of the first one that local staff take responsibility already in the building-up phase.

In consequence of all this, we also feel that it is impossible to introduce in a new country a ready-made distance education system already established elsewhere. We cannot decide in advance about the organization of the system or about the different components to be included in a distance education programme or about what kind of pre-produced instructional material should be used. What we can offer is our knowledge and our experience of distance education. Together with the local authorities and the local staff we may then arrive at a design for a particular distance education system. In line with what we have stated so far, the fourth principle would then be that as experts or consultants we are responsible for the training of the local staff. This training includes the training of course writers, editors, lay-out staff, and tutors. The training is based on specific handbooks developed especially for this purpose, and takes place during short work-

shops organized locally. When and how often these workshops should be arranged is a decision to be taken by the local authority.

One project where we are involved as consultants, is the establishment of a distance education institute for teachers' training in Sri Lanka. The target group is untrained teachers working full time in primary and secondary schools. Sri Lanka, like many other developing countries, has a large number of untrained teachers and to put the backlog right the distance education programme was introduced. The programme has been carried out in cooperation with Hermods and supported by SIDA. The programme started in 1981 at the request of Sri Lanka, and we made a first planning visit to Sri Lanka. The purpose of this visit was to carry out an on-the-spot investigation of the possibilities of building up a distance education system, taking local conditions into account.

After SIDA had agreed to support the programme and the local authorities had decided to concentrate on the programme, the first workshop was arranged in July, 1982. During this workshop (2 weeks) the general outline for the system was laid down. After our discussions, the local authority decided to include the following components in the system:

- printed self-instructional material (comprehensive type)
- assignments for submission
- contact lessons (seminars)
- local study centres
- practical training.

In the same workshop, the first training of course writers took place. The next workshop was held 3 months later and in between the two workshops, the course writers made drafts for the first modules (lessons). The drafts were discussed and some had to be rewritten after the discussion. At the same time, the training of editors and lay-out staff was begun. During the following workshops the training and discussions continued and new categories of staff were included, such as tutors, administrative staff, illustrators, and researchers. So far, seven workshops have been held, the latest one in April, 1985.

In December, 1983, the programme was formally inaugurated and the first 4,500 trainees received their first set of course material. The estimated time to complete the training is 3-5 years. In July, 1985, steps were taken to admit another 5,000 trainees. In April, 1985, - more than one year after the inauguration - only about 300 students have dropped out (7 per cent), which is an extremely low drop-out rate.

The staff of the Distance Education Branch have written, illustrated, edited and laid out the course material. For the printing, local facilities have been utilized. From our point of view the outcome of the programme is quite impressive.

Another project where we are currently involved is a distance education programme for secondary education and teachers' training in Ethiopia. Conditions are somewhat different in that project. In Ethiopia there is already an established distance education programme which has been in operation since 1978. That programme

now needs to be revised and expanded. Radio support is an essential part of the Ethiopian programme, whereas study centres play a less central role than in Sri Lanka. Our roles as consultants differ accordingly.

We have also had a request from Mozambique. As in other countries there is also a need for distance education for untrained teachers. Mozambique has no experience of distance education, and we have made an on-the-spot investigation there to clarify the conditions.

After more than ten years of theoretical work and research in distance education, we have found the work of supporting developing countries in establishing distance education institutes an extremely stimulating, challenging and fruitful experience.

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